

Paper choice

AN IN-DEPTH SURVEY of consumer attitudes towards bottle labels claims to have revealed a clear preference for well-designed paper materials. Andy Thomas reports

The importance of bottle labels to customers has apparently been underestimated, according to a recent, in-depth marketing survey carried out for Brigl & Bergmeister, a leading manufacturer of label and packaging paper. On the basis of 100 in-depth interviews, the Bremen-based market research company nextpractice claims to have demonstrated that bottle labels are exceptionally important to the buying decisions of customers. The study concludes that label design and material are not a minor issue but a central tool in strategic brand management.

The report's background is the rise of global integration, which has dramatically increased complexity and speed of change for all protagonists in the market. Fierce competitive pressure has forced producers to optimise their processes continually and to utilise all conceivable economies of scale. In the fight for the cheapest prices, the distributive trade has expanded its position decisively, with the share of brands steadily increasing.

'From the customer's perspective, this trend has resulted in a proliferating range of goods which is increasingly diminishing the scope for differentiation. Given an overload of information which is increasingly difficult to process, people are longing for differences which make a real difference. In their overtaking everyday lives customers seek guidance at the point of sale and the point of use.'

The contribution from conventional advertising 'seems exhausted in a world whose media whizz has long since left behind people's processing capacity. Buying decisions are becoming increasingly spontaneous and emotional. As brain research strikingly shows, the processing of unconscious impressions has a much greater bearing on actions than our own experiences would suggest.'

The more unclear the world becomes, the greater the importance of intuitive decision-making criteria. 'From the perspective of branding, the moment at which the customer grabs the product moves to the center of attention.'

When the Bremen-based market research company nextpractice completed its research into the psychological effect of bottle labels, the results were clear cut:

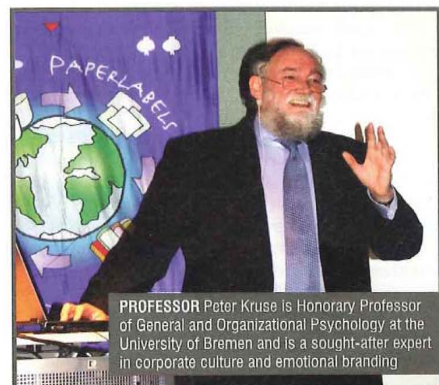
'The results surprised us in terms of their clarity,' noted Professor Peter Kruse, brain researcher and scientific director of the study. Summing up its findings, Professor Kruse noted: 'In the study we used an interview technique which makes it possible also to identify a person's unconscious attitudes. This showed that the emotional impact of bottle labels is exceptionally high. Compared with other consumer areas, customers react to the design and material of bottle labels extremely sensitively and with a broad range of feelings. We had not expected that to be the case.'

In the study a large number of bottles currently on the market were made available to the consumers surveyed. The materials and the beverage brands were balanced out in such a way that the reactions measured could be clearly related to the differences in label design and material.

The study concluded that consumers preferred paper labels to plastic labels irrespective of the bottle material. In a direct comparison, the paper labels were virtually always preferred. 'Paper is perceived as being of higher quality and more reputable,' says the report. 'The customers associated quality, festiveness and reward with the paper label. Beer, water and fruit juices are very strongly associated with paper labels.' The report claims a 'relatively better ecological balance of paper compared with plastic plays a not insignificant and evidently increasingly important role in this regard. The use of natural materials is of high importance to people, especially as far as packaging for foods, beverages and tobacco is concerned.'

Notwithstanding the preference for paper, the report says consumers do not forgive a label design which is below standard. 'Regardless of paper or plastic, a supplier which fails to use the bottle label as a calling card for their brand runs

the risk of collecting significant penalty points. If the paper label is reduced to the conventional square form or the plastic label simply covers the bottle like a second skin, a great opportunity to raise the brand's profile has been squandered. An especially important enthusiasm factor with the design of a label, alongside harmonious coloring and clear lines, is evidently the shape. All the consumers who took part in the study intuitively stressed the multi-section and unusual design of labels as an especially positive distinguishing criterion.'



PROFESSOR Peter Kruse is Honorary Professor of General and Organizational Psychology at the University of Bremen and is a sought-after expert in corporate culture and emotional branding

ON THE STUDY

In the summer of 2008, nextpractice surveyed 100 final consumers in in-depth interviews lasting several hours on their perception and assessment of bottle labels in the context of buying behaviour and consumer habits. The study focused on the emotional effect of paper labels compared with plastic labels. An IT-assisted psychological interview technique known as 'nextexpertizer' was used, claimed to make it possible to detect and compare people's unconscious preferences.

The Bremen-based consultancy and methodology company nextpractice was founded in 2001 by the brain researcher Professor Peter Kruse. Alongside market research and trend analysis, nextpractice is engaged in management consulting. Peter Kruse is Honorary Professor of General and Organisational Psychology at the University of Bremen and a sought-after expert in corporate culture and emotional branding both nationally and internationally. Together with the nextpractice company, he has received several awards for the development of innovative analysis methods and management tools.

The study was commissioned by Brigl & Bergmeister GmbH, which claims that one hundred billion labels a year are printed on its special papers.